DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 106 683 CG 009 737

AUTHOR Figley, Charles R.
TITLE Integrating Affective Learning in the Classroom: A Heuristic Approach.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Objectives; Behavioral Objectives; Educational Innovation; *Group Relations; Higher Education; *Instructional Materials; Interaction; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Program Descriptions

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a structured three-hour program in the area of interpersonal relations designed to supplement classroom instruction. The program, called the Discovery Session, is designed primarily to meet specific affective educational objectives associated with a college undergraduate course in intimate interpersonal relationships. Rationale, goals, and objectives of the program along with component exercises are identified. Highly favorable reaction by participants is noted. The limitations, implications, and applications of the program are outlined. (Author/PC)

ED106683

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

INTEGRATING AFFECTIVE LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM: A HEURISTIC APPROACH

Charles R. Figley

Purdue University

CG 009 737

ABSTRACT

The paper describes a structured three-hour program in the area of interpersonal relations designed to supplement classroom instruction. Rationale, goals and objectives of the program along with component exercises are identified. Highly favorable reaction by participants is noted. The limitations, implications and applications of the program are outlined.

There has been an increasing emphasis in higher education on affective learning in the classroom and its special importance in courses dealing with human behavior in general and functional, programatic courses in particular (Rogers and Coulson, 1969). Although a majority of affective and interpersonal training has been carried out through encounter group settings, alternative approaches through structured group interaction has been suggested which attempt to train specific skills in interpersonal communication (Danish, 1972).

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the application of structured group interaction in an undergraduate course dealing with intimate human behavior by specifically describing a three-hour program designed to supplement more traditional educational experiences.

Among the affective behavioral objectives in the author's introductory marriage course are: (1) an appreciation for effective use of communication skills; (2) the willingness to discuss personal issues such as love, sexuality and self-concept; (3) awareness of one's own personality, attitudes, values and how these were formed; and (4) sensitivity to individual human behavior as a function of a variety of life situations.

A variety of activities and experiences are provided to ensure that the objectives stated above are reasonably met. These include a high level of class interaction through class discussions, role playing, buzz groups, panels, debates, etc., as well as individual projects such as a self-analysis paper (a structured analysis of the student's autobiography), and an interpersonal relationship (Knox & Patrick, 1971).

Following is a detailed description of an innovative program that is primarily designed to meet specific affective educational objectives

associated with a course in intimate interpersonal relationships. The program is entitled the Discovery Session.

The Discovery Session

Purpose and Objectives

The session is usually scheduled one evening during the fourth or fifth week of the course and in a setting which can accommodate comfortably at least thirty people. The main function of the session is to help students become more comfortable in the class discussions in particular and all interpersonal situations in general. Consequently, the program is structured to: (1) develop an interpersonal identity among the class members -- to create a "we" feeling within the class; (2) develop an appreciation for interpersonal communication skills; and (3) become more aware of how class participants perceive each other, their first and immediate impressions.

Pre-Session Orientation

Because the session is not required, the session must be "sold" to the class. In addition to the general promises of "a time well spent" and a "meaningful" experience, the class is assured that some form of extra credit will be earned with no evaluation of individual performance. It is especially stressed that the Discovery Session will involve little risk of emotional upset. Following this initial announcement, the general context, limitations, and purpose of the session is explained in order to avoid any undue anxiety. Often the explanation includes the following: (1) the session is not a T-group or encounter, (2) that it is highly structured and adequately supervised to safeguard against any psychological trauma, (3)

that specific goals are stated and session is oriented to meet those stated goals, and (4) that every student who has gone through the session has reacted positively.

Setting

Care is taken prior to the session to create a relaxed and comfortable physical environment. Only low intensity lamp lighting is used during the sessions. Ideally, the group would have access to a large, carpeted room with pillows to sit on the floor. For added comfort, soft music and refreshments are used to enhance a comfortable and warm physical environment.

Orientation

As the class members arrive, they are immediately asked to locate themselves in one of the two rooms and given a task which will hopefully avoid pre-session jitters. The task includes some preliminary paper work: putting their name at the top of two 5' x 8' index cards and filling in preliminary information on the cards for the session's evaluation measure. They are then asked to become acquainted with the other class members, especially those with whom they are least familiar, until the session begins.

Following the arrival of all expected class members and after the two groups have approximately equal members, the members are asked to sit down on the floor and form two concentric circles, the inner circle facing out, the outer circle facing in, toward the inner circle.

Because the circles are structured to form dyads between members of the two circles, the group should have an even number. If there is an odd number, the extra member is asked to join the outer circle teaming up with one of its members and forming a triad, rather than dyads as the inner

rotates as explained in the next section.

Exercise I: Introduction Bombardment

Purpose. Although the class is structured to encourage interaction, most of the class members are not well-acquainted with each other. The purpose of the first exercise is to enable the group members to become acquainted with each other in a relatively short period of time. This initial contact provides some necessary data (minimum personal impression) to be used later in the session.

Procedure. First, the purpose of the exercise is briefly explained as a technique to "enable you to interact and begin to 'discover' your classmates as real human beings rather than simply occupants of a seat in class." The group members are asked to find the partner closest to them in the opposing circle. Members of the two circles are asked to quickly become acquainted with their partner and are told that at the end of a five-minute period, the inner circle will shift clock-wise and pick a new partner and, again, attempt to become familiar with that person within the allotted time.

After the inner circle has rotated completely, the exercise is terminated. The inner circle members are asked to blend into the outer circle so that a member of the opposite circle is on either side. The group is then given a five-minute break and asked to return to the room in the same location for the next exercise.

Comment. The exercise has proved to be an effective beginning for the session. It gets everyone involved and provides at least an initial introduction to fellow group members. It is difficult, especially toward

the end of the exercise, for the participants to rotate to the next partner. One of the participants later commented: "It seemed like five seconds rather than five minutes . . . it whetted my appetite to know more about these people and others I had not met yet."

Exercise II: Feeling Reflection

Purpose. Primarily, the function of this exercise is to provide an initial experience of affective response. Affective response in this context includes the experiences of (a) recognizing them reflecting one's own feelings to non-intimates; (b) discover how one is perceived by others; (c) estimating another person's feelings based on a given, and often limited, amount of data from a variety of sources; (d) realing that conclusions about others are a function of the quality of data (information perceived by the concluder) in their possession at any given time; (e) being understood and possibly accepted by others; and (f) simply talking about oneself in a group of unfamiliar people.

Procedure. After the group is reassembled, the members are asked to pair up with someone with whom they have talked in the previous exercise, but who is not sitting next to them.

When the group is matched, they are asked to think about how they feel "at this moment in time and space" and to write these feelings on the front side of the first card (which has their name at the top) in a few sentences or a paragraph. The facilitator often suggests that they may be feeling a variety of things and asks the participants to try and describe all of them.

After completing the task they are asked to turn the card over and write their partner's name at the top. Similar to the previous task, they

are asked to "consider your partner and write down how he/she feels at this point in time and space;" in other words, what they think their partner had written on his card. Often the group members need encouragement to write anything about their partner in general and their true perception in particular. Often their responses are a tactful compromise of their true feelings about the other; however, this is acceptable for this situation. As a means of summarizing, they are asked to circle three words in each statement (both sides of the card) that best describe the feelings.

Following this segment of the exercise, the members are asked to exchange cards with their partner.

While the class members are reading what their partner had written, the purpose of the exercise is explained. It is noted that in our daily lives, we interact with a great variety of people with whom we have a wide range of familiarity -- from a stranger of a different race and nationality to a brother, from a class acquaintance to a best friend. In each of these relationships we make assumptions about the other, based on the data (processed information) we have about them, be it stereotypes, non-verbal or verbal cues, etc. Often the data is distorted due to prejudices, projections or our common inability to perceive accurately. It is explained that one of the purposes of the session is to become more sensitive to human behavior and more aware of and competent in interpersonal communication. This exercise is seen as a first step in the process.

The last phrase in the exercise is to "compare notes" among the dyads in the group. Each dyad in turn reads aloud each other's perception of present feelings of self and others: Person A reads aloud what Person B wrote concerning B's own feelings. B in turn reads what A wrote concerning

how he believed B was feeling, and vice versa. In other words, in each dyad one persons's feelings are considered first as written by the person himself and then as written by his partner, noting similarities and differences. As the perceptions are compared, the person who had assessed his partner's feelings is asked upon what data he has based his perceptions. Often it is based on an earlier discussion in the first exercise or classroom interaction. Some of the more perceptive members refer to non-verbal cues (posture, eye contact, etc.) or some other indirect information. At any time any group member may ask questions or offer comments about the perceptions being compared. The facilitator assists the partners in each dyad in their interpretation of the feelings described on the cards and helps them to recall and articulate how their perceptions of their partners were formed.

Comment. This exercise has served as a mild and non-threatening introduction to interpersonal encounter. For a large majority of students, this is the first experience in interpersonal group work and can, therefore, be a highly intimidating experience if adequate structure and controls are not used. As one of the participants lated noted on his evaluation: "I was really hyper (sic) waiting for the session to begin, mainly because of a really bad encounter group I went to at the counseling center, but this is really fantastic!"

Exercise III: Verbal Bombardment

Purpose. The purpose of this exercise can be divided into three areas: (1) developing interpersonal communication skills -- listening, speaking and empathic responses; (2) building personal and group affective cohesion by disclosing personal perception; and (3) generally expanding an

individual human potential through group response.

Procedure. After a ten-minute break, the group is asked to sit anywhere that is comfortable, while the exercise is outlined.

It is explained that the accuracy in the last exercise for estimating your partner's feelings was dependent on a number of things, usually on the level of acquaintance. Roommates tend to estimate each other's feelings more accurately than do perfect strangers. This is because the former group has the advantage of having experienced each other in a variety of situations and conditions, while the latter group has only the most superficial data with which to make their judgments. The quality of the interaction is vitally important.

The structure and success of this exercise is founded upon two assumptions about the participants: (1) they would like to be understood and (2) they are interested in how others see them. This exercise, it is explained, will hopefully accomplish the above goals. Additionally, the exercise provides a powerful test of one's interpersonal communication skills: listening, speaking, empathizing, as noted below.

The exercise is called "verbal bombardment" because as each person takes turns being "it" or assuming the role of LISTENER, he will be verbally bombarded with personal impressions (feedback) by his fellow group members who will be assuming the roles of SPEAKERS.

The following is an outline that is followed:

(1) Someone volunteers to be the listener.

(2) Group gives feedback (see role of speaker for specific guidelines).

(3) After pause, listener summarizes all feedback to the satisfaction of the group.

(4) Listener responds to feedback:

(a) Commenting on what was correct.

(b) Commenting on what was incorrect.

(c) Additional explanations about self and relationship with others.

(d) General comments.

(5) Listener asks for and responds to questions from the group.

It is noted at this time that our skill in listening, although learned in infancy, often deteriorates, especially under conditions which evoke defensiveness on the part of the listener. Perhaps the listener is more concerned with the implications of the message. For example, he may be thinking, "Why did he say that?" "How did he get that impression of me?" "What can I say to change this impression?"

There are important responsibilities in both roles of listener and speaker which should be closely adhered to, not only to maximize the effectiveness of the learning experience and serve as an adequate test of one's interpersonal communication skills, but also to enhance communication competence in all interpersonal settings.

The following guidelines should be followed:

SPEAKER:

(1) Be honest, which means "owning" your own feelings.

(2) Be descriptive rather than evaluative (NTL, 1967, p. 47).

(3) Be specific rather than general (NTL, 1967, p. 47).

(4) Relate interpretation (e.g. "you are shy") to specific behavior (e.g., "you do not talk much and avoid my eyes").

(5) Speak directly TO the listener rather than to the group.

(6) Everyone should respond to the listener -- even if only to repeat what others have said (This gives the listener a better idea of what is the consensus of the group.)

(7) Everyone should be attentive and involved.

LISTENER:

(1) Concentrate on feedback without a RkS (response rehearsal set) of other non-attentive behavior.

(2) Do not speak except to ask for clarification from the speakers.

(3) Acknowledge to the speaker when feedback is understood (nod of the head, etc.).

(4) Look directly at the speaker to encourage feedback.

(5) Be certain group is finished with feedback before summarizing.

(6) Summarize thorough -- at least to the satisfaction of the group -- before responding.

After the instructions are explained and understood by the participants, the facilitator asks for a volunteer to be the first listener to begin the exercise. After everyone has been given the opportunity -- no one is forced to become the listener and receive feedback -- as listener, the facilitator proceeds immediately to the next exercise.

Comment. The smaller the group in most cases, the more effective the experience, mainly due to the time required for each listener. However, because the Discovery Session is part of the total classroom experience, time is a limiting factor as well as the logistical considerations. Initially, the Sessions were designed to meet with the class discussion groups (four in each class) separately. It soon became apparent that four separate evening

evening meetings per class was an unnecessary duplication. The present session structure is able to serve an entire class in one evening (three hours) while at the same time successfully meeting the behavioral objectives.

Because the present exercise is rather lengthy and that two groups are going simultaneously, one slightly ahead of the other, the facilitator attempts to station himself at a location where both groups may be observed. It is important for the facilitator to be unobtrusive, yet always available to both groups.

Exercise IV: Feeling Recognition

Purpose. This exercise is designed mainly for closure and secondarily as a safeguard for the participants, monitoring their emotional state to avoid any carry-over of unresolved anxiety from the previous exercises. A third purpose of the exercise is to unite both groups as an attempt to share each group's experiences with the other in hopes of promoting class cohesion and comraderie.[1]

Procedure. Without a break following Exercise III, the group is asked to use the second card and again think about "how you feel right now." Again, afterwards they are asked to circle three words that "best describe how you feel now."

---

[1] I believe this purpose may be an important one since when the groups are not able to interact at the end, the participants later complain that although they felt much closer to their group members, the felt LESS comfortable with members of the other group and wished they could have talked with them too.

In the second part of the exercise the members are asked to simply shake hands with everyone in the group, exchange cards with them and read how they are feeling now. Depending on the coordinating abilities of the facilitator, the other group in the room is also in the last exercise. If and when this is the case, the room divider is drawn back and participants are asked to follow the same procedures with every member in the room.

After a few participants are completing their contact with everyone, the participants are informed that this is the last exercise and for each to see the facilitator before they leave. It is the responsibility of the facilitator to collect all cards, making certain that each participant's emotional state is satisfactorily positive (in an overwhelming number of cases, cards from Exercise IV contain statements of euphoria!). The facilitator also reminds each participant to fill out the open-ended questionnaire as soon as possible and bring it with them to class at the next meeting.

Comment. During the session and especially during this last exercise, the facilitator must monitor the participants for any anxiety, depression, disappointment, etc. The cards that are collected in this exercise serve as an excellent indicator. If any negative feelings are expressed, the facilitator takes necessary steps to alleviate possible post-session depression. This may range from a brief questioning to an extended discussion after the session.

Student Response to the Sessions

Measured objectively as well as subjectively, student response to the

sessions have been overwhelmingly positive.[2]

An open-ended Discovery Session Evaluation Questionnaire accompanied each session and was filled out by every participant. The questionnaire asked the participants to comment on what they liked, what they disliked, suggestions and comments. A large majority felt that they had reached the stated objective.

Most of the participants liked the Verbal Bombardment exercise most and the first exercise, getting acquainted, least. Many liked the feeling of intimacy, trust, sharing and comraderie that had developed in the session.

Most of the negative comments were directed at logistical elements: time, room, physical comforts, credit given, etc. However, a more substantive issue was the latter section of Exercise IV when both groups are not able to get together at the end. As noted earlier, unless the session is rushed for time, the last exercise tends to correct for this feeling of isolation with the "other" group. Also noted was the skepticism about the validity of the feedback.

Summary and Conclusions

There seems to be an increasing interest in and demand for affective education in higher education and the need for a more humanistic approach to learning.

A program was developed to supplement a functional marriage course and designed to develop: (1) interpersonal communication skills, (2) openness

---

[2] A random sample of the 256 completed questionnaires have been categorized and is available along with a sample questionnaire by writing the author.

with personal issues, (3) self-awareness, and (4) a more congenial classroom environment for learning. A program, A Discovery Session, lasts approximately three hours and contains four highly integrated and relatively structured exercises. The sequence of the exercises proceed from general introductions among participants through a process of receiving and giving constructive feedback to a critique of participants' present feelings.

Although the response from students who have participated in the Discovery Sessions is overwhelmingly positive, further verification is necessary. The Discovery Session would appear to be a valuable addition to most courses that investigate human behavior and interpersonal relationships. However, other social or educational settings are equally appropriate and would require little structural modification.

Recently the program has been incorporated into a programmed learning module so that small groups can participate in the Discovery Sessions without a leader. Research is underway to more precisely evaluate the efficacy of the program in general and the effects of leaderless groups in particular.

References

Danish, S. J. Structured group interaction. Journal of College Student Personnel, 1972 (January).

Knox, D. and Patrick, J. A. You are what you do: A new approach in preparation for marriage. The Family Coordinator, 1971, 20, 109-114.

NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science. Feedback and the helping relationship. In NTL Institute: Reading Book. Washington, D. C.: NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, 1967 (mimeographed).

Rogers, C. R. and Coulson, W. R. (Eds.) Freedom to Learn. Columbus, Ohio: Charles C. Merrill Publishing Company, 1969.